

University of Groningen

## CLIL in the North: finding true north?

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## CLIL in the North: finding true north?

CLIL teaching in the Netherlands is very popular: roughly 130 secondary schools offer CLIL education. But did you know that only nine secondary schools in the north of the Netherlands currently offer bilingual education? This means that CLIL education is still not at cycling distance for every teenager in the Netherlands. We do not want to sound too American when saying that no child should be left behind, but we do feel very strongly that the position of CLIL in the north of the Netherlands is something that has to change. Time to take action and navigate the CLIL path, because, who knows, a new group of enthusiastic people might find true north. Let us give you an update. **By Nienke Smit**

### CLIL at Dollard College

One of the newest kids on the CLIL block is Dollard College in Winschoten. After she finished her master's degree in teaching English in 2013, Betty Bos was determined to set up a programme for CLIL education at her school. During her MA research project Betty had learnt how to design CLIL lessons in tandem with PE and geography colleagues. She and her colleagues had tried out their CLIL lessons and evaluated them. They immediately realized that CLIL teaching offered possibilities to activate students, encourage them to think and to use the English language in a different way. "It made more sense to learn English this way", says Betty, "the school needed a boost and we really wanted to offer a programme for excellent students." Very soon she found colleagues who were keen to help her set up a CLIL programme.

The team convinced the school management that they would be able to pull this off in Winschoten, a small town in the north east of the Netherlands, where population decline is noticeable. The highly motivated team of experienced teachers is on a mission to make a difference in Winschoten and to develop their English language and teaching skills. The team went to Cumbria, took Janet Streeter's course, came back energized and started teaching their CLIL group in August.

### A team effort

The team spends a lot of time talking about and rumbling with their new roles. They notice that they get a lot of energy from exploring each other's strengths, brainstorming to integrate ideas and existing educational projects. They have been brainstorming to integrating ideas

Dropbox for online collaboration, YouTube clips for authentic input, EdPuzzle for listening activities, voice and video recording tools for oral presentations and lots more.

Of course working together can be a challenge. The teachers experience it takes a lot of time to talk things through, to elaborate on new ideas, to explore each other's subjects and to sit

**'Answers to these questions cannot be given in a single sentence or paragraph'**

down and do the work together. A shared vision of what they want to achieve, building a thriving CLIL department at their school in Winschoten, is their driving force. In a relatively short period of time they have really learnt how to motivate each other.

### Backward designing a CLIL course

Meanwhile, at the University of Groningen, we also felt that CLIL needed a boost in the north. Together with Marjolijn Verspoor (professor of English as a second language), Jasmijn Bloemert (EFL teacher educator) and Deniz Haydar (marine biologist and teacher educator) we set up a professional development course for new and experienced CLIL teachers. Because we aim to teach what we preach, we followed a backward design approach to develop our curriculum and formulated guiding questions such as:

- How can you foster learner language development?
- How can you evaluate the level of content and the level of language in CLIL teaching materials?
- What is scientific thinking? And what is cognitive academic language proficiency?
- How can you learn concepts through English? And what is the role of visualisation?
- How can you work together in a multi-disciplinary team when there is no (or very little) time?

During the training sessions these questions

are discussed. Possible answers to these questions require extensive reading, discussion and practice. An important first step is exploring theoretical notions about for instance learner language development or scientific thinking that are relevant for CLIL teaching, the second step is putting theory into practice in for instance simulations, group work and materials development activities. The third step the teachers need to take is to implement their new ideas in their lessons.

Answers to these questions cannot be given in a single sentence or paragraph, our CLIL course is spread out over one school year, in order to be able to revisit these questions. Working together for a year also gives us (CLIL teachers and teacher educators) the opportunity to get to know each other, learn from each other and to collaborate: what is happening in the school feeds back into the course.

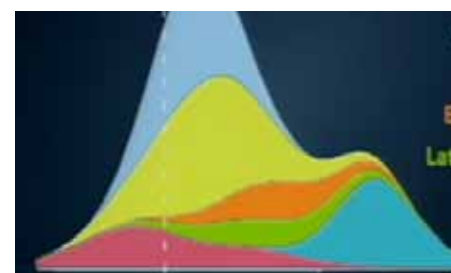
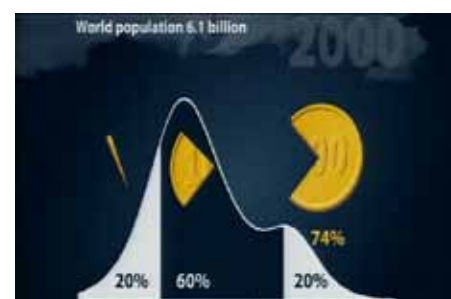
### Talk the talk activity

To give you a flavour of our course we will share an activity in which content and language are truly interwoven. The activity is called "get the scientific picture and talk the talk". Talking about graphs forms the starting point for this

**'We find a lot of motivation and inspiration in multi-disciplinary collaboration'**

activity. In order to do this you need a graph, chart, figure or infographic from a popular science article or from the popular science section of a general newspaper. The activity aims to foster language and content awareness, focusing on scientific thinking, the role of visualisation and explaining graphs (see boxes 1 and 2 for the instructions).

Are CLIL teachers and CLIL teacher educators finding true north? Time will tell, but we can definitely say that we find a lot of motivation and inspiration in multi-disciplinary collaboration. As CLIL students, teachers, teacher educators and researchers, we are learning a lot from each other and having a really good time.



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### Box 1 - Task:

We all know the saying "a picture paints a thousand words". But that does not only go for art or photos, we can also apply this principle to infographics, figures and charts. Someone who nicely illustrates how much we can say about a graphical representation of figures and numbers is Hans Rosling. As a non-native speaker of English, Hans Rosling shows how you can explain figures in effective and simple language. This is of course not as easy as it seems, but it is something you can practice. If you do not know him, watch his TED talk online: [https://www.ted.com/talks/hans\\_rosling\\_shows\\_the\\_best\\_stats\\_you\\_ve\\_ever\\_seen?language=en](https://www.ted.com/talks/hans_rosling_shows_the_best_stats_you_ve_ever_seen?language=en)

You are going to write a paragraph for a popular science magazine / section in a newspaper. Write about your interpretation of the graph. Use at least 200 and a maximum of 300 words.

### Box 2 - Checklist:

Use this checklist to guide your thinking.

1. Examine the graph (observing & looking: the silent phase)
2. Describe the graph / chart
  - What is the title/topic of the chart?
  - What sort of graph / chart are we looking at?
  - What kind of information can we find in a chart / graph like this?
3. Focus on the information you want to / need to get from the chart / graph
  - Read (off)/ interpret the graph
  - Read the accompanying questions? / Formulate questions about the graph?
4. Identify the trend / process:
  - What is happening / what happened?
  - What are the most noticeable thing(s) about the graph?
  - What was measured? What kind of data does the graph represent?
  - Identify the variables. Independent variables? Dependent variables?
  - Can you spot one of the four basic trends: upward movement / downward movement / no movement / change in direction
  - Main change over time?
  - What is the pattern over time / for different people / animals / countries / places etc.?
5. Use the following production scaffolds in order to talk the talk:
 

• Area	• Decline	• Gradual	• Peak
• Approximately	• Decrease	• Growth	• Plunge
• Be constant	• Dip	• Improve(ment)	• Plummet
• Boom	• Dramatic	• Increase	• Progression
• Bounce back	• Drop	• Just under/over	• Push down / up
• Climb	• Escalate	• Marked	• Raise
• Collapse	• Extension	• Moderate	• Rapid
• Considerable	• Fall	• Minimal	• Reach a peak
• Crash	• Flatten out	• Notable/-bly	• Reduction
• Cut	• Fluctuate	• Level off	• Recovery
• Curve	• Go down	• Level out	• Remain stable



Nienke Smit is an EFL and CLIL teacher educator at the University of Groningen. She holds an MA in English language and culture and is a PhD candidate in educational psychology and applied linguistics. For more information about the CLIL course at the University of Groningen see: <http://www.rug.nl/education/lerarenopleiding/professionalisering/studiedagen/tto-clil/> or email [tto@rug.nl](mailto:tto@rug.nl)